

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs  
together with the National Framework Implementation Working Group

# Transitioning from out of home care to independence

A national priority under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's  
Children 2009 - 2020



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# Foreword

Under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009 – 2020, (the National Framework) Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments have committed to improve support for young people leaving care as a priority, in recognition of the financial and social cost of poor outcomes. The National Framework, endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments in March 2009, outlines the case for a broad response by all sectors if outcomes are to be improved.

The paper has been prepared with the National Framework Implementation Working group, established to oversee the implementation of the National Framework. It summarises some key evidence from the literature and notes some existing good practice examples of support for young people leaving care. It articulates a vision for the future and identifies the key actions as the first steps to improving the effectiveness of the transition from out of home care for young people that will be progressed through the Transitioning to Independence National Priority under the National Framework. The key actions are:

- A nationally consistent approach to leaving care plans;
- A review of the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA).

## A nationally consistent approach to leaving care plans

The scope and content of leaving care plans differs across jurisdictions and care providers. The content of leaving care plans varies in terms of language used and areas covered e.g. health, housing, education, training, employment, self-care skills, financial management, identity issues, relationships etc. Variations also occur in the processes used to develop, implement and monitor leaving care plans (e.g. who is involved, when does the planning start and implementation end). Increased consistency across jurisdictions is needed to deliver equity in the planning process for young people, regardless of their location.

## A review of the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA)

A review of the TILA is one of the key actions under the Transitioning to Independence National Priority in the first three year action plan for the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020. Since its introduction in 2003, TILA has grown from the original policy intent of assisting young people transitioning from statutory care, to assisting young people transitioning from any type of care. Other changes have also been made. Broadening the client base and other changes have brought with them a number of issues which have been identified by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, and service providers

Further information about each of these key actions is provided at **Attachment F**.

As well as identifying these key actions, this paper also points to further opportunities across both government and non-government sectors for consideration in future policy development and service delivery reforms.

Improving transitions and outcomes for young people leaving out of home care cannot be addressed in isolation. The need to build positive foundations through the development of essential life skills during care, and to support positive outcomes when leaving care and after care, is well recognised under the National Framework.

Addressing issues to improve the quality of pre-care and in-care experiences is being progressed through other national priorities and actions, including the National Standards for Out of Home Care. The National Standards for Out of Home Care will drive improvements in the quality of care to enable children and young people living in care to have the opportunity to reach their potential in all areas of well-being. The National Standards will promote continuous improvement across child protection services and thereby support better outcomes for children and young people leaving care, no matter where they live. The principles within the draft National Standards aim to ensure that outcomes are measured, monitored and reported.

For the purposes of this paper, young people transitioning from out of home care to independence means those young people with Children's Court ordered care arrangements, where the responsibility for the young person has been transferred to the Minister/Chief Executive. This definition aligns with that in the National Standards for Out of Home Care.

# Vision

***All young people transitioning from out of home care to independence receive support from governments, non-government organisations, family members and/or carers, business and the community to experience an effective transition and reach their full potential for social and economic participation.***

There are many services already available to young people transitioning from out of home care to independence and some young people experience an effective transition and achieve very positive outcomes. Many, however, do not. There is an opportunity to improve the effectiveness of this transition for more young people leaving out of home care through better planning and preparation for leaving care; better targeting of existing services to young people with a care experience; actions to encourage the engagement of these young people with existing services, and developing stronger, more effective referral pathways.

All young people deserve the opportunity to achieve their full potential for social and economic participation. The National Strategy for Young Australians articulates the vision for young people to grow up safe, healthy, happy and resilient and to have the opportunities and skills they need to learn, work, engage in community life and influence decisions that affect them. It reaffirms the commitment we all share to ensure that young people develop the confidence, resilience and skills they need to be involved and productive citizens. Young people transitioning from out of home care deserve these same opportunities.

Business, families and/or carers, the community sector and young people, as well as governments, all have a role to play in achieving this outcome.

# Introduction

## Definition of the problem

Despite the wealth of evidence in the literature about the key elements supporting effective transitions for young people leaving out of home care, and the legislative and policy frameworks existing within many jurisdictions, many of these young people do not receive adequate assistance during the transition period to establish stable social and economic independence into the future.

This is due to a number of factors, including:

- Sudden exits from care without adequate post care support;
- Young people who exit care at age 18 and move jurisdiction;
- Insufficient outreach by post-care and mainstream services;
- Insufficient capacity and expertise across the system to meet the particular, and often complex, needs of young people transitioning from out of home care to independence;
- Insufficient support for carers to facilitate a smooth transition to independence;
- Inadequate assessment of needs and planning support for young people;
- Young people choosing to disengage from the system;
- The low profile of leaving care services within the broader community;
- Disparity between policy and practice;
- No 'whole of system approach' to working with young people transitioning from out of home care to independence.

The willingness and ability of these young people to engage constructively with support services and to sustain effective relationships, without support is a significant issue. This may be true for many young people however the literature suggests that those leaving care lack trust, alienated by a system that has not always given them the stability or sense of belonging that they need to thrive. Many are further alienated by a community that they are unable to relate to. This is often compounded by poorly developed social and emotional skills as a result of pre-care and in-care experiences. Lack of engagement by many of these young people is a critical issue that must be addressed if government and non-government organisations and services are to effectively reach them.

## Understanding the process of transition from out of home care to independence for young people leaving care

Transitioning from out of home care to independence can be conceptualised as a process comprising a series of "phases" occurring along a continuum (Maunder, Liddell, Liddell and Green 1999). The literature suggests that the period of transition spans the age range from 15 to 25 years (Mendes, 2008; McDowall, 2009), commencing with preparation for leaving care and ceasing at the point of independent adulthood.

To enable effective transitions to independence, support must focus on:

- Social transition – relationships, community participation, housing, health and well-being (including self –esteem and identity) and the development of practical skills required for independent living;
- Economic and financial transition – education/training, employment and income.

Transitioning to independence is a major life event for any young person and for most, the process is gradual, well supported and occurs over a prolonged period. Typically, a young person within a family setting, continues to receive support and guidance to develop the necessary social skills and networks to support their move from dependence, to interdependence and finally, to independence. In most cases, families provide a safety net allowing the young person to return to the family home and/or support if needed.

Studies cited by Stein (2004) however, show that young people in out of home care have to cope with the additional challenges of major changes in their early lives in a far shorter time than other young people. Stein states that young people transitioning from out of home care have compressed and accelerated transitions to adulthood (p.120). Mendes (2009) cites Cashmore and Paxman (2006) and Mech et al. (1995), and reports that:

*'care leavers lack the social support networks typically utilised by young people as they make the transition from child welfare dependence to adult independence. Many face independence alone and isolated without a safety net of extended family, friends and wider community supports such as neighbours, school teachers, sports coaches, and religious or cultural associates.'* (p.38)

More recently, a critical component of the stakeholder consultation process for the development of the National Standards for Out of Home Care has been the engagement of young people who have been, or are currently in, the out of home care system. Sixty four young people, ranging in age from 12 to 25 years, with varying levels of engagement and care experiences participated in the consultation process.

The consultations identified the leaving care process as central to the quality of the overall out of home care experience. The final consultation report highlights the importance of adequate preparation and planning for transition, empowering individual care leavers to make informed decisions and facilitating access to transition and post-care supports (KPMG 2010). These findings are consistent with those in much of the literature, including the CREATE Report Card 2009. A more recent consultation with young people conducted by CREATE on behalf of FaHCSIA further corroborates these views.

## Policy Context

Governments recognise that vulnerable and disadvantaged young people require additional support to overcome barriers and achieve positive outcomes in health, housing, education and employment. A key example is the Commonwealth Government's National Strategy for Young Australians. This strategy identifies eight priorities for supporting young people to succeed and build lives of their own. It articulates the vision for young people to grow up safe, healthy, happy and resilient and to have the opportunities and skills they need to learn, work, engage in community life and influence decisions that affect them. It reaffirms the commitment we all share to ensure that young people develop the confidence, resilience and skills they need to be involved and productive citizens.

There are a number of government initiatives currently supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged young people. The National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions (the National Partnership) commits Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to increase the educational engagement and attainment of young people and to improve their transition to post school education, training and employment.

The Youth Connections program funded under the National Partnership aims to ensure young people at risk of not attaining Year 12 or an equivalent qualification get the support they need to remain engaged, or to re-engage in education or training and build resilience, skills and attributes that promote positive choices and wellbeing.

In addition, Governments are also recognising that many young people leaving out of home care face additional barriers as a result of their care experience. As an example, the 'no exits into homelessness from statutory care' initiative, under the White Paper on Homelessness, provides additional support to these young people, many of whom experience homelessness or are at risk of homelessness.

# Profile of young care leavers

## Statistics

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report, *Child protection Australia 2008-09*, states that, on 30 June 2009, there were 34,069 children in out of home care (AIHW 2010). Approximately one third were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children<sup>1</sup>. Just over half (52 percent) were males. Fifteen percent (4,973) were aged 15 – 17 years. 2,406 of those aged 15 – 17 years were discharged from out of home care in 2008-09. This is an increase of around 16 percent on the previous year.

## Characteristics

The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute report *Pathways from out-of-home care, April 2010* (the AHURI report) details a study by Johnson et al. who surveyed 77 young people aged between 18 and 25 years. These young people had been in care at some stage in their lives but were no longer in care. Of significant concern are the findings of this study indicating that, of those surveyed:

- 77 percent were categorised as following a **volatile pathway** from out of home care<sup>2</sup>;
- 53 percent had an educational attainment of **Year 10 or below**;
- 25 percent were **homeless**; and
- 53 percent reported a problem with **substance abuse**.

A summary of the characteristics of the young people on each pathway described in the AHURI report is at **Attachment A**.

The findings from a 2009 survey of 471 young people aged 15 to 25 years in care or who had left care conducted by the CREATE Foundation and published in the CREATE Report Card 2009 indicated that, at the time of survey:

- 64 percent did not have a leaving care plan;
- 35 percent were homeless in the first year of leaving care;
- 46 percent of boys were involved in the juvenile justice system;
- 35 percent completed Year 12<sup>3</sup>;
- 29 percent were unemployed (compared to the national average which is 9.7 percent); and
- 28 percent were already parents themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> The national rate of Indigenous children in out of home care was just over nine times the rate for other children.

<sup>2</sup> A volatile pathway from care is described as indicating a problematic transition from care where the young person's experiences in care and since leaving care are often chaotic, characterised by extreme instability and restricted housing opportunities.

<sup>3</sup> The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) cited in Muir et al. (2009) found that just over half (55.3 percent) of young people aged 17.7 years were in Year 12 in 2009.

Paxman (2007) cites a study of NSW care leavers by Cashmore and Paxman (1996) that found 50 percent of the young women who had left care had married or were living in de facto relationships, mostly with children, within four to five years after leaving care. One in three were pregnant or had given birth before the age of 20 compared with only 2 percent in the general population; and by the age of 24 over half (57 percent) of care leavers had children, compared with 6 percent in the general population.

This profile indicates that while a proportion of young people experience a smooth and supported transition and achieve very positive outcomes, a significant proportion do not. The evidence points to the complex and multiple disadvantage characteristic of many young care leavers and this directly impacts upon their ability and/or willingness to engage with support. This significant issue must be considered in any approach that aims to improve the experiences and outcomes for young care leavers making the transition to independence.

Stein (2004) suggests that, in broad terms, young people transitioning to independence fall into one of three outcome groups:

- those 'moving on' from care;
- those 'surviving';
- those who are 'struggling'.

**'Moving on'** care leavers are those who have had a positive out of home care experience and developed a high level of resilience. Transitioning to independence for this group is likely to occur later, be gradual and planned. Individuals in this group tend to have good practical skills, positive interactive relationships and good social networks. Stein cites a study by Hart (1984) who found that those whose after care experience was most successful were those who participated in 'general' or open access activities and opportunities as distinct from 'specialist' care provision.

Significantly, Stein suggests that individuals within the 'moving on' category should be considered to provide mentoring to other young people transitioning to independence.

**'Survivors'** care leavers have experienced more instability, movement and disruption while living in care than the 'moving on' group. They tend to have left care younger, often following a breakdown in foster care or a sudden exit from residential care. Survivors are likely to experience further movement and problems after leaving care, including periods of homelessness, low-paid casual or short-term employment, unfulfilling work and unemployment. They are also likely to experience problems in their personal and professional relationships. This group is characterised by high degrees of agency dependency for assistance with accommodation, money and personal assistance. Nevertheless, some combination of personal and professional support networks could help them overcome their very poor starting points at the time of leaving care.

**'Strugglers'** care leavers are the most disadvantaged. They have experienced damaging pre-care family experiences and in the main, care was unable to compensate them or help them overcome their past difficulties. They are likely to leave care younger, following a placement breakdown and lack, or have alienated personal supports. At the time of leaving care, their life chances are very poor and aftercare support is unlikely to be able to help them overcome their very poor starting points. They are more likely to experience unemployment, greater difficulties maintaining accommodation, be homeless, be lonely, isolated and have mental health problems.

# Cost-benefit analysis

In 2006, Morgan Disney and Associates undertook a study to inform the Community, and Disability Services Ministers' Conference (CDSMC) (and governments) about the current alternate pathways of young people after they leave formal care, and the comparative cost of these pathways to governments.

The intention of identifying the alternative pathways and their costs was to establish the extent of potential cost savings if a proportion of young people were successfully diverted, through better support at the point of transition, to lower usage service pathways and to pathways which are economically and socially more productive.

The total (gross) estimated cost to government for a cohort of 1150 people who had left the formal child protection care system, across their life course from ages 16-60, is over \$2 billion. This is equivalent to a cost of approximately \$46 million for 1150 persons per annum, and an average cost of \$40,000 per person per annum. An extract from the Morgan Disney and Associates report is at **Attachment B**.

Using the Morgan Disney and Associates pathways approach, we know that around 45 percent of young people who transition to independence have similar service usage costs to those of the broader population. These young people are likely to fit within Stein's moving on category. However, this same approach indicates that 55 percent of young people who transition to independence are in pathways which are high cost across their life course – between \$1 million and \$2.2 million on average from age 16 up to 60.

Research undertaken by Raman, Inder and Forbes (2005) estimated and compared lifetime costs per person from the leaving care population and from the general population in Victoria. The analysis included eight cost areas of state government support: justice and corrective services, housing, health, GST revenue and child protection (reflecting the intergenerational cycle of care). The analysis shows that the Victorian Government spends \$738,741 more on each care leaver compared to a non-care leaver over an adult lifetime. It is noted that this significant estimate does not include the substantially higher outlays incurred by the Commonwealth Government such as income support payments and health care.

The cost-benefit analyses of investing in the 15 to 25 year age group points to a need to provide appropriate, accessible support for care leavers to achieve social and economic participation which, over time, will facilitate a positive return to the community on this investment. Some jurisdictions already have legislation or policy in place to provide support for young people after they have left care, on an 'as needed' basis. This was discussed by McDowall (2009) and is summarised in Table 1.

The target group for the *Transitioning to Independence* national priority project includes all young people transitioning from out of home care. While the needs of young people whose characteristics are consistent with those of the 'survivors' or 'strugglers' and whose levels of service usage are within the *moderate to high cost service usage categories* are a focus of this project, the importance of ensuring that programs are universal, and available when required to all young people leaving out of home care is the primary focus.

**Table 1: Legislative and Policy Requirements for Post Care Support (2009)**

\* Denotes a range of services and support is available on an 'as needed' basis

State/Territory	Legislation or Policy	Duration of Support*
Northern Territory	Legislation	<b>Planning to begin:</b> 15 years <b>Support provided:</b> Up to 25 years*
Victoria	Legislation	<b>Planning to begin:</b> Above the age of 15 years and at least 12 months prior to young person exiting care <b>Support provided:</b> Up to 21 years*
Western Australia	Legislation	<b>Planning to begin:</b> at any time after the person reaches 15 years of age <b>Support provided:</b> Up to 25 years*
New South Wales	Legislation	<b>Planning to begin:</b> At or above the age of 15 years and at least 12 months prior to a young person exiting care. (2 years in the case of young people with disability.) <b>Support provided:</b> Up to 25 years (or after at the discretion of the Minister under exceptional circumstances)*.
South Australia	Policy	<b>Planning to begin:</b> At age 15 years <b>Support provided:</b> Up to age 25 years under the Transitioning from Care Policy or through the Post Care Service for which there is no specified age limit.*
Tasmania	Policy	<b>Planning to begin:</b> At age 15 years <b>Support provided:</b> for one year following discharge from care, but may be up to three years (or age 21 years). Financial support can be provided from age 19 years through referral to the After Care Support Program and continue up to the age of 25 years*
Queensland	Policy	<b>Planning to begin:</b> one month prior to young person's 15 <sup>th</sup> birthday <b>Support provided:</b> 18 years, and if support is considered necessary for the young person after the age of 18 years, a Special Services Case must be opened. There is no upper limit to the duration of support stated, either in legislation or policy however the expectation articulated in the policy is that the duration of a Special Services Case intervention generally should not exceed 12 months*
Australian Capital Territory	Policy	<b>Planning to begin:</b> Leaving care plans are to cover a 5 year span, including the years that the young person is still in care. Planning should commence no later than 16.5 years <b>Support provided:</b> Up to 21.5 years, depending on age at which planning commences*

# The systems approach

The issues and barriers impacting upon successful transitions for young people leaving formal out of home care are well known, have been well researched and are uncontested. There are numerous research papers, practice guides and state and territory initiatives that have explored the issues, made recommendations for action and been used to inform policy development and practice aimed at improving transitions from out of home care to independence. The evidence points to the need for the system as a whole to respond to the needs of these young people and to work collaboratively across structural boundaries to engage effectively with them. More effective engagement will support more young people being diverted from the most expensive pathways described by Morgan Disney and Associates (2006) and fewer becoming the *survivors* and *strugglers* described by Stein (2004).

Young people external to the care and protection system are most often supported by family members, significant others and/or the broader social system to transition to independence. Young people in the out of home care system need to be similarly supported and have similar opportunities and experiences. Support across the system that is responsive to the diversity, challenges and complexities characteristic of many of these individuals must be considered as a priority.

By taking a systems approach to the issue we can examine:

- what is working well within each component of the system, and explore options for strengthening or expanding these initiatives more broadly;
- where current supports, processes and initiatives are breaking down and what actions could be taken to improve outcomes;
- where innovation is occurring within the system and how innovation, including community capacity building and social enterprise, could be incorporated more broadly.

Adopting a systems approach and conceptualising transitioning from out of home care to independence as a process comprising a series of phases along a continuum allows for an analysis of the roles, responsibilities and linkages that need to exist across different parts of the support system. These include:

- the Commonwealth Government;
- state and territory governments;
- non-government organisations;
- the community;
- the business sector.

This approach also enables some analysis of which young people are accessing what supports during what phase, acknowledging that not all young people in out of home care move through each of the phases described here. This has implications for identifying what actions can be taken when, and by whom, to support young people transitioning from out of home care to independence.

Expanding the role of the business sector in supporting young people with a care experience is a key interest for a number of governments and non-government organisations. Some within the business sector already provide support for programs and initiatives that assist young people transitioning from care to independence through financial assistance, pro bono activities of their staff and professional support to community organisations.

Mentoring programs, social enterprises, traineeships and cadetships, sponsorships for community-based programs and support for volunteers are some examples of partnerships with the business sector supporting young people transitioning from out of home care. The School Business Community Partnership Brokers Program under the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions is another example. This program brokers partnerships between and among schools, business and industry, parents and families and community groups to support student engagement and improve education and transition outcomes.

# The Transitioning to Independence Process

Maunder et al. (1999) in a report to the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (NYARS)<sup>4</sup> recommended that:

*'effective models of support must take account of the need to provide a continuum of care for children so that they can make a graduated transition from care to increasing independence as they mature and grow.'*

Maunder et al. proposed a general model including three components:

1. **Preparation** through:
  - a high quality, stable system of care;
  - improved case practice and planning;
  - a flexible support continuum which emphasises interdependence, i.e. the notion that well-functioning adults continue to receive support from others.
2. **Transition** through:
  - assistance for young people to develop personal and social networks;
  - provision of effective support and living skills programs;
  - provision of essential and appropriate information to young people about their past, and their options for the future;
  - the involvement of suitable mentors.
3. **After care** offering:
  - continuing access to support, resources and interest from care agencies

The implications of the research findings of Maunder et al.(1999), as documented in the NYARS report, is at **Attachment C**. The NYARS report identified a number of recommendations relevant to each phase or component of the transitioning from out of home care to independence process. These recommendations, together with those included in other research cited within this report, are being further considered within the context of this project.

Using the model described by Maunder et al. (1999) as the 'ideal' approach to transitioning from out of home care to independence, this paper further defines the essential elements of each component (or *phase*) from a holistic, 'whole of system' perspective.

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<sup>4</sup> The National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (NYARS) was established in 1985 as a cooperative funding arrangement between the Australian, State and Territory Governments to facilitate nationally-based research into current social, political and economic factors affecting young people. The Scheme now operates under the auspices of the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA).

## Preparation - Phase 1

Stein (2008) states that many young people transitioning from out of home care miss out on the preparation stage. The evidence provided in the 2009 CREATE Report Card corroborates this view.

In a survey of 471 young people who were leaving or had left care, CREATE found that only 36% knew they had a leaving care plan or that one was being developed (McDowall, 2009). A third of this cohort reported they had little or no participation in the development of the leaving care plan. The majority of young people who had left care reported they felt unhappy, quite unhappy or very unhappy about the planning process. In the same study, only 23% of the post-care cohort felt they had received enough information to adequately prepare them for leaving care.

There are also significant variations in the scope, content and language within care plans across jurisdictions, and across government and non-government sector service providers. This has the potential to exacerbate the issue.

Preparation and planning is fundamental to ensuring the transitioning to independence process has direction, is supported and that the young person has a sense of control over decisions about their future. We also know that, when young people are able to build or maintain connections with biological or foster families, social or professional networks, their pathways out of care are typically much smoother than those experienced by other care leavers (AHURI Report, p.35).

Mendes and Moslehuddin (2006) state that in-care supports need to be followed by adequate preparation for independence and formal legislative and programme responses to young people leaving care. (p. 122) They advocate that 'preparation for leaving care should involve a significant transition period including independent living skills programmes, the provision of leaving care information and the involvement of suitable mentors.' The importance of young people actively participating in defining their needs during transition is also highlighted.

Restating the essential components required in this phase of transitioning to independence and contrasting these with what is occurring in practice, it is evident that there is scope to improve the preparation phase.

The essential elements are identified as:

1. the approach to planning and/or preparation is tailored to meet the individual needs and circumstances of the young person;
2. planning and preparation commences while the young person is still in care - no later than age 15<sup>5</sup>;
3. the need for therapeutic support is considered and provided to young people where indicated, as part of the preparation phase (to address issues such as unresolved anger, grief and loss, anxiety, trauma and/or juvenile justice);
4. the young person is central to the planning and preparation process and is empowered to be an active participant;
5. the young person is supported through the preparation phase by a primary person or worker with whom they have a positive relationship;

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<sup>5</sup> The authors of the AHURI Final Report, *Pathways from Out of Home Care 2010* advocate for beginning the planning process earlier to help identify those at risk of leaving care unexpectedly, and also ameliorate some of the issues younger care leavers face.

6. preparation includes the development of a user friendly, leaving care plan that is used by the young person and their significant others to support their future. This plan should:
  - detail the goals, actions required and person/s responsible to implement each action;
  - include mechanisms for monitoring and review of the plan at agreed intervals and amending as necessary to ensure it remains current;
  - incorporate actions that will ensure the young person is aware of, and knows how to access, their entitlements and records;
  - identify the relevant professional, personal and mentoring supports required to assist the young person through the transition process;
  - include a contingency plan acknowledging that a young person's needs and circumstances can change at short notice.
7. the plan recognises the role of each part of the support system and facilitates the constructive engagement of the young person with specialist and/or mainstream services when and where appropriate. This includes post care support.
8. based on the *Looking after Children* framework adopted by most jurisdictions, the eight priorities identified in the Australian Government's *National Strategy for Young Australians* and Reid's (2007) 'seven pillars' of successful transition referenced in the *CREATE Report Card 2008*, planning should focus on assisting the young person to:
  - secure post care accommodation;
  - participate in education, training, employment or other suitable activity;
  - develop core life skills such as managing money and meeting financial commitments, meal preparation, job applications and interviews, learning to drive, access to healthcare, social skills and relationships, legal services and advocacy;
  - access income support and other financial entitlements such as TILA, rent assistance and Youth Allowance;
  - know about and engage with relevant specialist and/or mainstream support services. The advantages of disclosing care leaver status when accessing services is fully explained to, and understood by, the young person;
  - reconnect with/ or re-establish effective relationships with, family members where appropriate.
9. family conferencing is provided to support safe and effective reconnections with families, where appropriate and feasible;
10. preparation and planning recognises transitioning to independence as a gradual process;
11. preparation and planning recognises the need for the young person to experiment and take risks but incorporates strategies to maintain support when these plans fail. This is consistent with the literature on normal adolescent development and the experiences of most young people;
12. the carer is involved in the planning process with the young person, where appropriate;

13. the young person and their carer receive clear information about which agencies are involved in certain stages of the process as well as relevant organisational connections.

A mapping of the core elements and responsibilities for the **Preparation Phase** is at **Attachment D**.

## Transition – Phase 2

Evidence and theory suggest that the transition phase should support the young person to achieve *interdependence* from their carers and the out of home care system as a precursor to *independence*.

Mendes and Moslehuddin (2006) highlight the accelerated transition to independence of young people leaving out of home care in contrast to that of other young people. Most other young people still live at home until their early twenties and continue to receive social, practical, emotional and financial support. The significance of access to the family home as a safety net for most young people, is also emphasised in this research.

Mendes (2007) also described the ‘abandonment’ of children by the state as a ‘substitute parent’ and the expectation that, as young people, they will transition directly from childhood dependence to self sufficient adults without the ongoing financial, social and emotional support and nurturing offered by most families of origin. He pointed out that ‘this ending of support crucially coincides with either the final years of schooling or the beginning of attempts to gain employment’. Mendes advocates for transitions from care to reflect developmental maturity rather than age alone.

A young person transitioning to independence is often alone with few, if any, supports. While we know that many attempt to reconnect with their families of origin after they leave out of home care, research shows that many soon discover the same issues and dysfunction that separated them in the first place and so leave this situation, often after a very short period, without anyone to support or care for them (Cashmore and Paxman, 1996, p.3).<sup>6</sup> A study by Forbes and Inder (2006) surveyed 60 young people who had been in care for at least two years during their childhood, in Victoria. They found that 43 per cent had received no help from any family member within the first two years of leaving care.

In recent years, legislation within some jurisdictions has been amended to improve the support provided by the ‘state as substitute parent’ and now includes provisions allowing the state or territory child protection authority to continue supporting the young person up to 25 years. The inconsistency of the legislation across jurisdictions however, is well documented in the 2009 CREATE Report Card and is noted as an issue.

Summarising the evidence from the literature, an effective transition phase requires:

1. the transition plan to be implemented, monitored and modified as required, and overseen by a key professional or support person;
2. the carer to be involved in the transition phase with the young person and to also have their needs met during the process;
3. mentoring relationships to be continued and consolidated;

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that the young person may still have the desire to be connected to their family members, even if family members are able to provide little, if any, practical and/or emotional support.

4. a focus on the development and consolidation of living skills, including social and relationship skills, through mentoring and structured programs;
5. the transition to occur gradually, consistent with transitions to independence made by young people more broadly;
6. flexibility and effective contingencies to ensure adequate responses to changing needs and circumstances, in keeping with the young person's wishes;
7. young people leaving care to be formally recognised across the system as a 'vulnerable' group to support an appropriate and integrated service response;
8. the young person to be engaged in appropriate training, education or other activity to support their transition to social and economic independence;
9. the young person having access to financial support that is well targeted to their needs;
10. the involvement of the young person's birth family, where appropriate and desirable.

A mapping of the core elements and responsibilities for the ***Transition Phase*** is at **Attachment D.1**.

### **After care independence – Phase 3**

Research and evidence strongly supports the need for an integrated model of after care support for young people extending beyond the age of 18 (the upper limit of care orders executed by the courts) to at least age 25. In this context, Raman et al. advocate for governments to "act now as a prudent economist would, spend a little now to save a lot in the future. The cost of doing nothing is detrimental to young people, society and the economy at large". (Osborn, A. and Bromfield, L. 2007)

In Australia, the research and evidence to date has been based at the jurisdictional level or, as in the case of Morgan Disney's study, on a 'service usage pathways' approach. To date, there is no study that would inform governments of what type of support is required by these young people, for how long, at what cost, and that identifies the down stream savings if this support was extended through the 18 – 25 year age bracket.

In many jurisdictions, after care support services focus on continuing financial support for the young person, assistance with securing and retaining accommodation, emotional support and mentoring, and referral to other agencies. Mendes [2009(a)] advocates the importance of mentoring for young people given that care leavers are often socially excluded from mainstream social and economic systems.

The AHURI report also points to the importance of relationships with others as an important resource for young people, particularly those on a volatile pathway (p.3). The research highlights that the breakdown of housing was often a result of some form of relationship breakdown, with significant implications for work, education and social participation. Similarly, the report describes post-care accommodation arrangements for young people that are not supported by child protection authorities as 'problematic' (p.67).

Another key component as identified by Maunders et al (1999) is the ability of the young person to stay in contact with carers and/or departmental workers.

The CREATE Report Card 2009 refers to the Leaving Care Policy recently introduced by the Department for Child Protection in Western Australia as an example of positive action supporting young people transitioning from out of home care to independence. In relation to after care independence, this policy sets out criteria to determine when the process of leaving care can be considered as finalised, allowing for the provision of support to continue until age 25.

Essentially, an effective after care independence phase requires that tailored support, as identified in the *Transition Phase 2*, continues beyond the age of 18 years, where required. As stated in the AHURI report, there needs to be a 'no closed door' approach to give young people who experience problems after leaving care, the opportunity to re-access support and receive further assistance (p.61). In order to implement this approach, governments and non-government organisations – both specialist and mainstream – the business sector and communities, must work in an integrated and coordinated way that fosters engagement and assists the young person to develop the skills and resilience for a productive adulthood.

A mapping of the core elements and responsibilities for the ***After Care Independence Phase*** is at **Attachment D.2**.

# Transitioning from Out Of Home Care to Independence - an integrated pathway

A summary of the essential components and outcomes of the transitioning from out of home care to independence pathway, informed by the research and modelled on a program logic approach, is at **Attachment E**.

## Key actions

**Attachment F** outlines the key actions to be progressed as the first steps to improving the effectiveness of the transition from out of home care to independence for young people. These actions focus on improving the preparation phase through the development of a nationally consistent approach to leaving care plans; and reviewing the Transition to Independent Living Allowance.

It is noted that additional actions may need to be considered for specific groups. For example:

- those involved with juvenile justice;
- young people with disability;
- unaccompanied humanitarian arrivals;
- indigenous young people;
- young women;
- early care leavers, including those under legal school leaving age receiving income support.

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## Summary of Chapter 5 from *Pathways from out-of-home care*

### Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (2010)

#### 1. Smooth Transition from Care:

- Had few placements in care;
- Generally felt safe and secure in care;
- Felt involved in the planning process;
- Left care at a later age;
- Felt that they were better prepared for leaving care;
- Had a successful first placement, which facilitated a smoother transition from care.

The housing experiences and outcomes of those young people experiencing a smooth transition also tended to be described in positive ways:

- Spoke favourably about transitional arrangements, identifying the quality of the accommodation and support as a critical factor;
- Had important, reliable and consistent social attachments that provided resources that enabled them to access and maintain accommodation;
- Were able to use stable housing as a base from which to start engaging with employment, training and education opportunities;
- Had someone to fall back on if problems emerged.

#### 2. Volatile transition from care:

- Had a high number of placements in care;
- Experienced physical and/or sexual abuse prior to, or while they were in care;
- Rarely had an exit plan;
- Left care in crisis at a younger age;
- Been discharged into inappropriate accommodation, such as refuges or boarding houses.

The housing experiences and outcomes of those young people experiencing a volatile transition were marked by:

- Poor experiences of supported/transitional accommodation and specifically, being forced to share;
- Lack of professional support;
- Experienced a lack of privacy, safety and control over their accommodation;
- Substance abuse and mental health problems destabilising their housing;
- An absence of relationships offering resources that could be used to access and maintain housing. Their social networks were comprised of homeless and other marginalised young people, and many experienced

profound difficulties in maintaining relationships. Young care leavers in this category were also mistrustful of care and other welfare systems;

- Lost accommodation because of harassment, violence and/or relationship breakdown;
- Had difficulties coping with newly found autonomy and independence.

### ***Extract from *Transition from care: Avoidable costs to government of alternative pathways of young people exiting the formal child protection care system in Australia.****

#### **Morgan Disney & Associates Pty Ltd (2006)**

In 2006, Morgan Disney and Associates undertook a study to inform CDSMC Ministers (and governments) about the current alternate pathways of young people after they leave formal care, and the comparative cost of these pathways to governments. The intention of identifying the alternative pathways and their costs was to establish the extent of potential cost savings if a proportion of young people were successfully diverted, through better support at the point of transition, to lower usage service pathways and to pathways which are economically and socially more productive.

The total (gross) estimated cost to government for the cohort of 1150 people who have left the formal child protections care system, across their life course from ages 16-60, is over \$2 billion. This is equivalent to a cost of approximately \$46 million for 1150 persons per annum, and an average cost of \$40,000 per person per annum.

The study identified five typical alternative pathways that young people might follow after leaving care, reflecting different levels of avoidable (or preventable) use of government services, from low usage to very high usage levels across the following service systems: alcohol and other drugs, employment support, family support, health, housing, justice and mental health services.

The total (gross) estimated cost to government for the cohort of 1150 people who have left the formal child protections care system, across their life course from ages 16-60, is over \$2 billion. This is equivalent to a cost of approximately \$46 million for 1150 persons per annum, and an average cost of \$40,000 per person per annum.

Based on individuals' typical patterns of service usage and costs, three broad categories of service usage were identified.

Low cost service usage: Usage by this individual is estimated to cost governments, on average approximately \$124,000 over the life course from age 16-60, with an overall average cost per annum of \$2,800.

Moderate cost service usage: Usage by this individual costs governments, on average an estimated \$1 million over the life course from age 16-60, with an overall average estimated cost per annum of \$23,000.

High cost service usage: Usage by this individual costs governments, on average approximately \$2.2 million over the life course from age 16 up to 60, with an overall estimated average cost per annum of \$50,000.

An estimated 45 percent of young people who leave the child protection system require minimal or no support services beyond those provided and required by the general population. An estimated 55 percent, however, are in pathways which are higher cost across their life course, such as income support, with these costs increasing over time as an individual's health or life circumstances lead into high or very high cost health, justice and mental health services.

The findings of the study indicate that there would be significant economic, and social, benefits if more young people leaving care were better supported in ways that reduced the

likelihood of their progression into prolonged use of high cost services. It suggests that any policies directed at reducing the overall cost to government need to be two-pronged:

1. reducing the numbers of people on the most expensive pathways;
2. reducing the length of time they spend on these pathways.

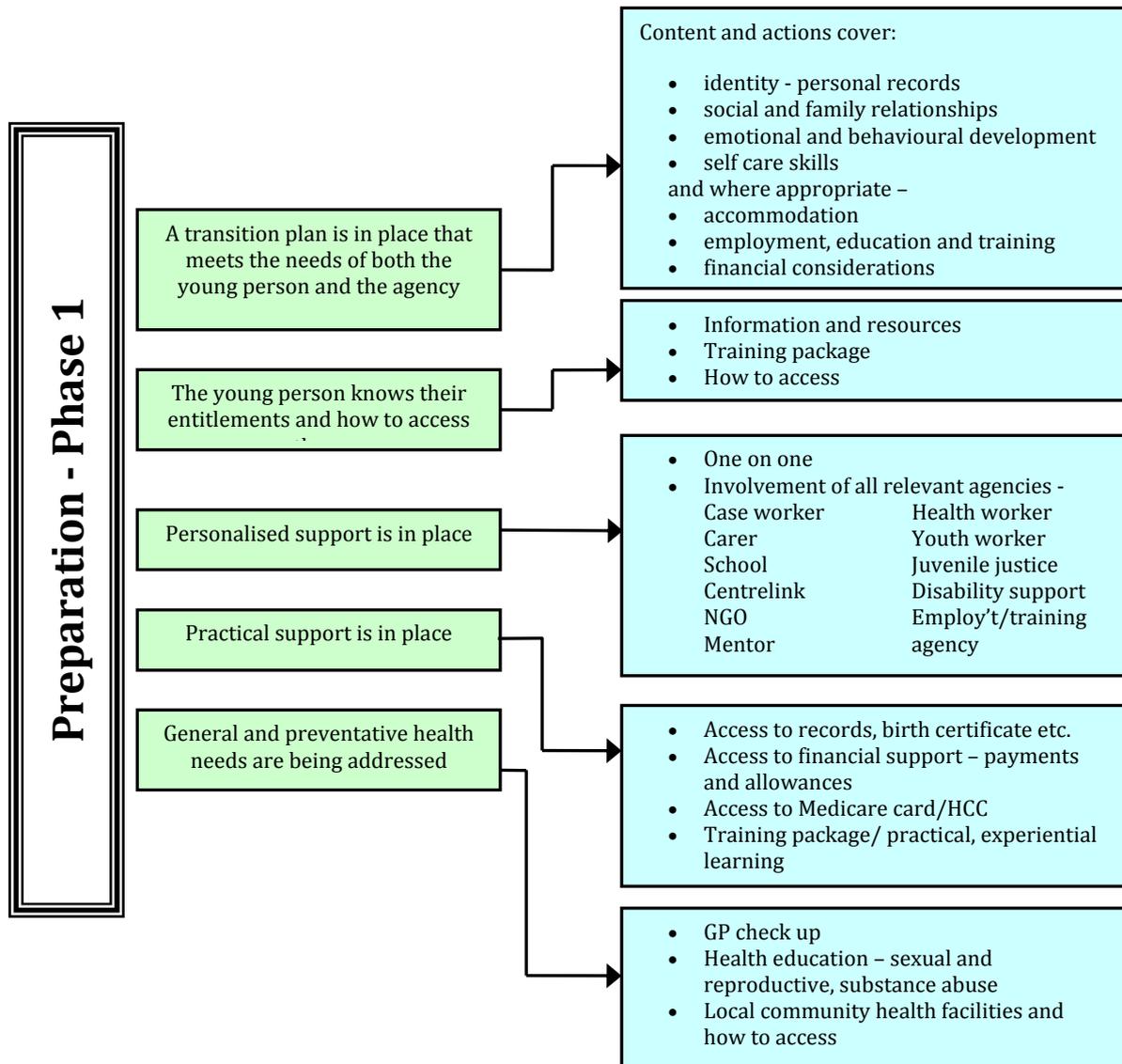
The study also suggests the need for immediate action in each jurisdiction to build onto existing data matching projects to assist in tracking young people who leave the formal child protection system and enter adult service systems.

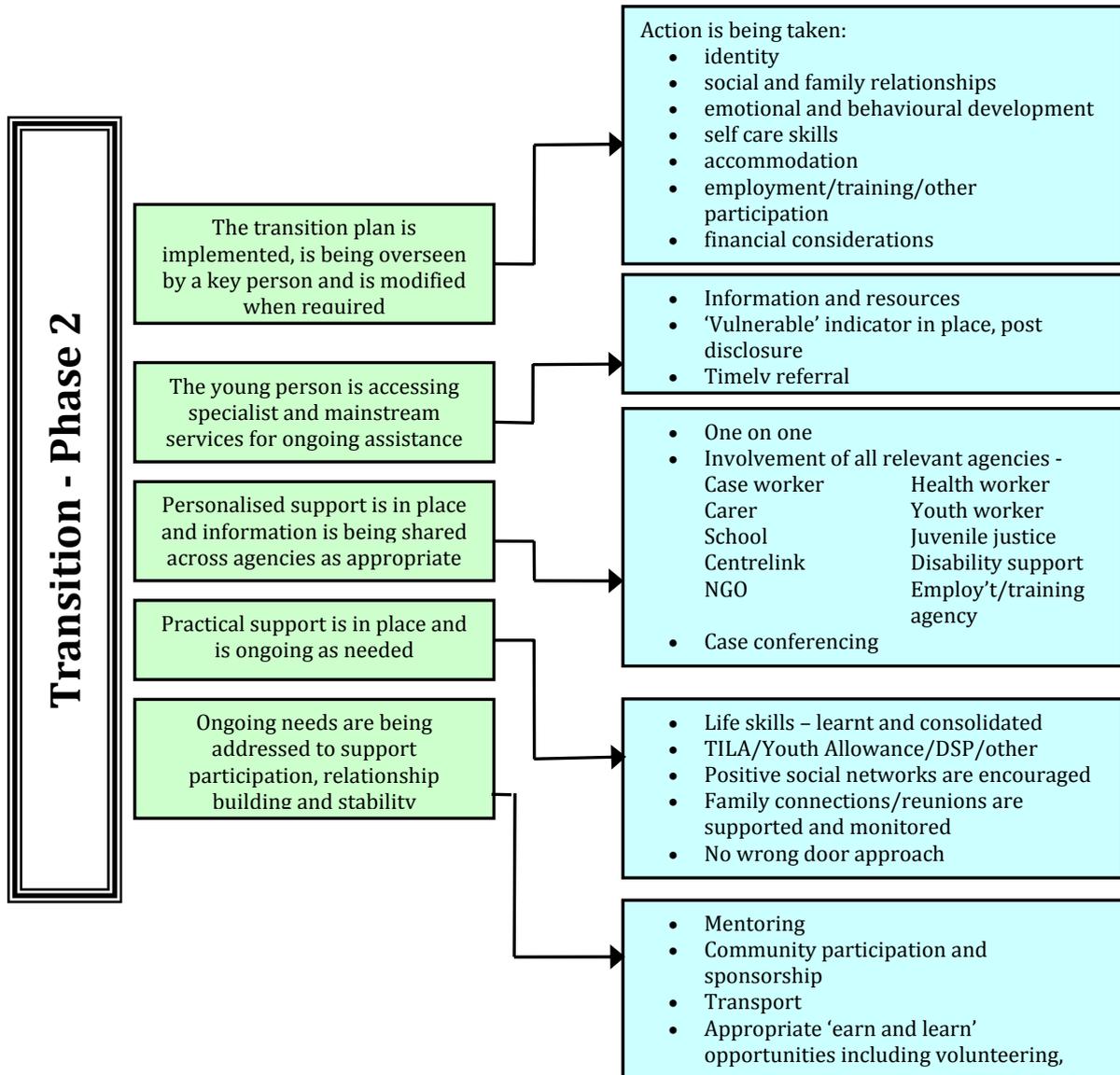
### **Extract from *Young people leaving care and protection: A report to the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme***

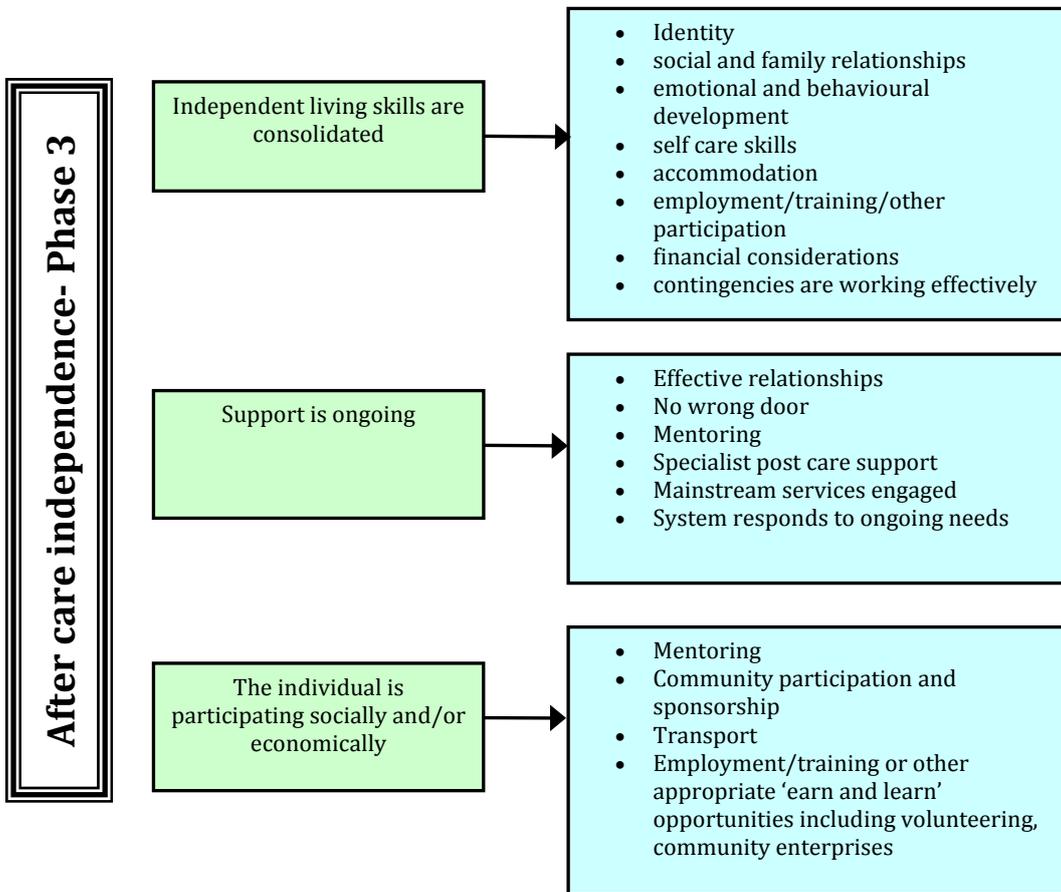
**David Maunders, Max Liddell, Margaret Liddell and Sue Green (1999)**

The implications of the research findings are that, in order to support the process of transition to independence and to minimise the risk of homelessness, Australian governments need to consider the following issues:

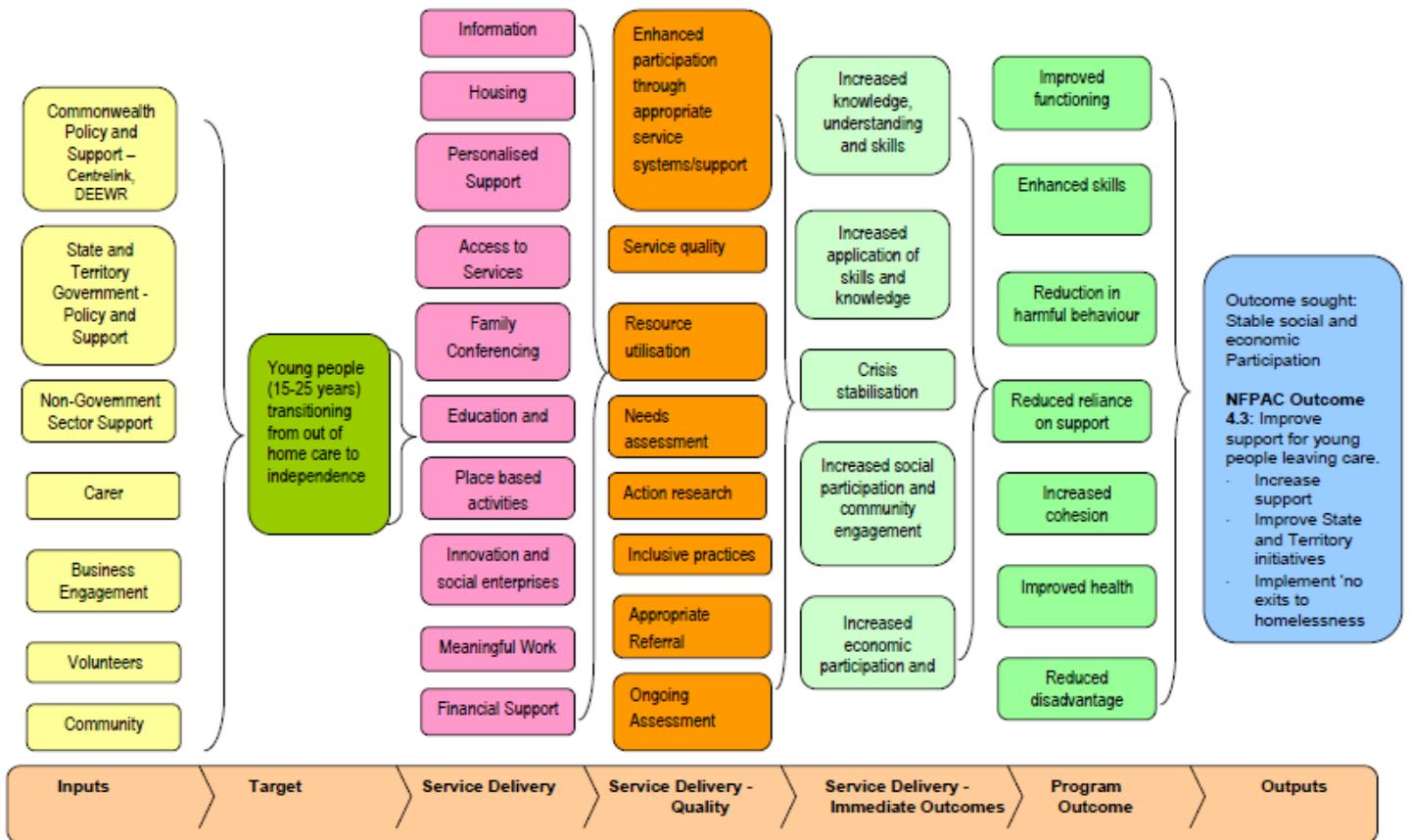
- the extension of the responsibility of State governments to provide after-care support for those who have passed through the care system at least until the age of 25;
- the responsibility of States to negotiate with the Commonwealth to provide benefits for those who have been in care;
- the need for each State and Territory government to continuously review its practices, responsibilities and role as guardian to increase consistency;
- the provision of Commonwealth benefits at the full adult rate to young people living independently after being in care who are unemployed, studying or undertaking job skills training;
- the review of case planning and preparation for leaving care to reflect community standards of leaving home at an older age and to provide flexible options for support;
- the availability of continuing support and counselling services, until the age of 25, for those who have left care;
- the provision of programs with a range of delivery options to assist transition;
- the training of workers and caregivers to implement effective programs of transition from care;
- the maintenance of family links wherever possible and offering support to families as young people move to independence;
- the provision of basic personal items and furniture to young people leaving care to establish independent living;
- the provision of an opportunity for young people to gain access to files and documents regarding their time in care, with the support of workers to explain and interpret;
- the maintenance and storage of records;
- provision for educational and literacy needs;
- provision of affordable, appropriate and stable accommodation for those leaving care for independent living;
- the review of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (TSI) young people leaving care, in collaboration with Aboriginal and TSI care agencies and communities to ensure that the Aboriginal placement principle works;
- the review of transition arrangements for young women leaving care for independent living.







## Transitioning to Independence Pathway



## Key Actions

### Key Action 1: Improving planning for leaving care

<i>The importance of planning and preparation for leaving care</i>	Under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments have committed to developing nationally consistent approaches to support young people leaving out of home care, including a more effective transition to independent living. A quality process of development, implementation and review of leaving care plans or transition plans, is recognised as integral to effective transitions to independent living (Johnson et al., 2010; McDowall, 2009; Forbes, Inder and Raman, 2006; Maunders et al., 1999).
<i>Building on State and Territory reforms</i>	Further reforms are needed to improve the experiences of young people leaving care, building on State and Territory reforms. Each State and Territory is, in accordance with legislation, required to prepare transition plans or leaving care plans for all young people leaving care. Nevertheless, recent studies suggest a disconnect between these legislative requirements and the experiences of young people.
<i>The need for a consistent approach</i>	The scope and content of leaving care plans differs across jurisdictions and care providers. The content of leaving care plans also varies in terms of language used and areas covered e.g. health, housing, education, training, employment, self-care skills, financial management, identity issues, relationships etc. Variations also occur in the processes used to develop, implement and monitor leaving care plans (e.g. who is involved, when does the planning start and implementation end). Increased consistency across jurisdictions is needed to deliver equity in the planning process for young people, regardless of their location.
<i>A first step</i>	Commonwealth, State and Territory governments and non-government organisations will develop a nationally consistent approach to leaving care plans, including content and language and the development of best practice guidelines that align with the National Standards.
<i>Gathering our knowledge</i>	To inform the development of a nationally consistent approach to leaving care plans, governments and non-government organisations will jointly gather and consider relevant information. This will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considering the views of young people with a care experience about what is relevant and helpful in the leaving care process. The findings of recent consultations with young people about national standards for out of home care and those facilitated by the CREATE Foundation about transitioning from out of home care will be included.</li> </ul>

- Consolidating existing national and international research and practice knowledge about effective practice in leaving care planning.
- Establishing an updated profile of relevant policies and procedures in each State and Territory which will help to identify existing effective practice as well as jurisdictional systems within which any new leaving care planning approach needs be integrated.
- Considering the role of business in supporting the implementation of actions included in the leaving care plan.

### **Key Action 2: Review of the Transition to Independent Living Allowance**

#### *What is TILA?*

The Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) provides one-off financial support to the value of \$1,500 for eligible young people aged 15 to 25 years who are about to, or have exited formal state based care and/or informal care such as juvenile justice, out-of-home care and Indigenous kinship care arrangements.

TILA commenced in 2003 in response to the report of the Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce, 'Footprints to the Future'. TILA is one measure of many aimed at improving the provision of support services to young people as they transition to independent living from out of home care. The Commonwealth Government, through the Office for Youth, directs \$3.8 million per year to TILA.

#### *Why review TILA?*

A review of the TILA is one of the key actions under the Transitioning to Independence National Priority in the first three year action plan for the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020.

Since its introduction in 2003, TILA has grown from the original policy intent of assisting young people transitioning from statutory care, to assisting young people transitioning from any type of care. Other changes have also been made to TILA such as the introduction of a 24 month limit for accessing TILA, the contracting of a single service provider, 'Southern Youth and Family Services' to administer the payment, and increasing the allowance from \$1000 to \$1500.

Broadening the client base and other changes has brought with it a number of issues which have been identified by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, and service providers.

These issues include:

- The risk that TILA may be oversubscribed and the impact of this on young people leaving care accessing the payment;
- Concern that some young people in some jurisdictions may not be accessing the payment due to a lack of awareness by young people, government and non-government service providers;

- Concern that some young people require more time than 24 months after leaving care to access TILA;
- Concern that the current system for accessing TILA is time intensive and cumbersome for the administering agency, referring organisations and young people.

*Future Direction*

The review of TILA will be led by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and is expected to be finalised by mid 2011.

The TILA Evaluation Steering Committee convened on 27 October 2010 and is comprised of representatives from:

- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
- Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
- Centrelink
- Department of Human Services

The review will consider:

- The strengths, weaknesses, key issues and trends of TILA and how it currently operates;
- The difference TILA makes on the lives of the young people who receive it;
- The eligibility criteria as set out in the Program Guidelines and possible alterations;
- The relevance of the program to current community needs.

